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VOLLEYBALL



A Look Through The 30 Year History Of Armstrong State Volleyball



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SAVANNAH, Ga. - In its 30-year history, Armstrong State University volleyball has grown to become not only one of the top varsity sport programs for the Pirates, but one of the top programs in all of NCAA Division II.

The numbers do not lie. Armstrong State has earned 13 NCAA Championship Berths, captured seven Peach Belt Conference regular season titles and five PBC Tournament titles. The Pirates were the first Peach Belt Conference team to advance to the NCAA Elite Eight in 2008 and 59 student-athletes have earned All-PBC honors overall. Seven student-athletes have been named Peach Belt Players of the Year.

One person who was a part of the humble beginnings of Armstrong State volleyball was William Buckley. A student at Armstrong State from 1983-88 and a former walk-on for the men's basketball team, coach Buckley served as the head coach for Pirate volleyball during the 1989-90 season.

With a limited budget, Buckley did the best with what he had to work with at the time. "Volleyball players, at that time, were also basketball players," Buckley said. Following his stint at the helm of Armstrong State volleyball, Buckley became a certified athletic trainer in 1993 and later became the head athletic trainer at Armstrong State, serving in that role until 2000.

Buckley remains involved in coaching volleyball around Savannah and says, despite the differences in ages and skill levels, some key factors remain. "You're trying to build athletes, but also people skills and life skills," Buckley said. "You have to figure out where they can succeed and have them understand what their role is."

Someone who brought much success to Armstrong State volleyball was head coach Alan Segal. Segal took over the Pirate volleyball program in 1999 and amassed a 233-104 overall record in nine seasons. The year before he took over, the Pirates had a won-lost record of 7-22 - his first team in 1999 posted a 36-5 record, tied for the best one-season turnaround in NCAA Division II history with Presbyterian College (1987).

Segal credits much of his success at Armstrong State to his players. "I firmly believe that you are truly as only as good as the players you recruit," Segal said. He has continued to be involved in his players' lives long after their playing careers and feels as much pride in their post-college successes as he does with what they did on the court.

With the rapid ascension of Armstrong State volleyball over the last decade or so, the future still looks bright for the Pirates. Armstrong State Athletic Director Lisa Sweany, on the job since 2011, feels that the success of the volleyball team is tied into the growth of the sport regionally. "Volleyball hasn't been a strong sport among high schools in the southeast, but it is growing," Sweany said. "I think our success has helped significantly with that growth."

Sweany and current Armstrong State head coach Will Condon see that there is no limit to what Pirate volleyball can attain in the future. The conference success and regional success can only lead to national success, where things will really take off, according to Sweany.

Condon took over the Armstrong State program in 2008 from Peach Belt Conference rival USC Aiken. Fresh off of two straight PBC titles himself, Condon led the Pirates to the 2008 NCAA DII Elite Eight and his teams have built a streak of eight straight NCAA Championships berths after the conclusion of the 2015 season. Even with the success, he shows respect for the coaches and players who preceded him.

"This program has grown in different ways, and we have had the opportunity to develop excellent players," Condon said. "We were able to build on what all of the previous coaches had developed." Even with the accolades and successes of Pirate volleyball, Condon still preaches the concept of hard work.

With no seniors on the 2015 squad and several injuries, the Pirates had to 'weather the storm' of the Peach Belt instead of storming through the league in years past. But Condon has been proud of how his team responded this year. "Our players have been resilient and they want to get better," Condon said. "They knew going in that we have to take everyone on our schedule seriously and not look past anybody."

When Armstrong State volleyball first started, it would have been easy to overlook the Pirates. Through the 30 year history, coaches and players never really knew what the end result would look like but were willing to make the sacrifices for the greater good of the program. One thing is for sure - there's no reason that the next 30 years of Armstrong State volleyball will be, through hard work and dedication, more successful than the first 30.

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